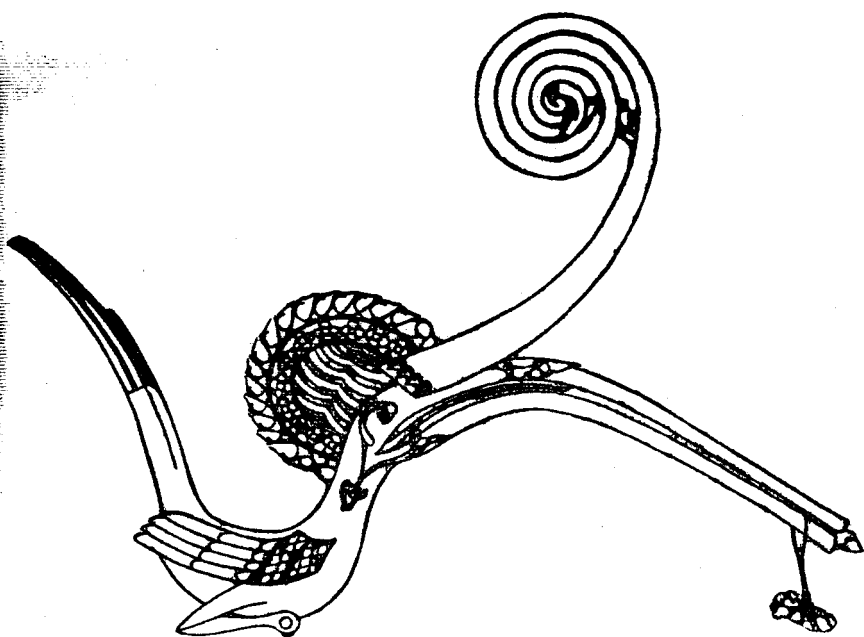

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Rhinoceros and man in Borneo¹

by

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INTRODUCTION

"Also any local stories, actual or folklore, on the rhino in the past anywhere in Borneo, would be of great interest for past background. Anthropologists please note", Harrisson (1975:71) wrote recently. During my perusal of the literature on Borneo in search of rhinoceroses (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis harrissoni* (Groves, 1965)), I have found a few references to the interaction between man and rhinoceros. They are here summarized to stimulate others to add their knowledge to these notes.

FOLKLORE AND ART

The rhinoceros is curiously absent from Bornean folklore. Both its alleged ugliness and its uncertain connection with the human 'palang' (see below) has been suggested as a possible cause (Harrisson, 1956: 268). Only one legend is known in which the rhinoceros plays a major part, but there must be others, unrecorded as yet. The Penyahbongs of Tamaloë told Lumholtz (1921: 386) about two brothers who, walking through the jungle, encountered a rhinoceros. They killed it and had begun to take off its hide, when suddenly it became alive again and chased the two men. They were saved by a *mora* tree, the leaves of which scared the spirit (*antoh*) in the animal away.

Two Bornean indigenous stories are also on record. The rhinoceros is supposed to snore loudly, in that way betraying its hiding place to hunters. After it has deposited its excrements into a stream, it eats the fish that come floating on the surface (Banks, 1931: 21).

The arts of the Bornean people likewise never portray the rhinoceros. Again Lumholtz (1921: 124-125, pl.) mentioned a recent exception. When he visited Tambung Marowei he saw "a sculptured representation of a rhinoceros with a man on his back, entirely com-

¹ Dedicated to the memory of Tom Harrisson, whose encouragement of my work on the Bornean rhinoceros has been invaluable.

posed of red rubber." The rhinoceros was about 75 cm high. The effigy resulted from a promise: some rubber collectors had said that they would make a *badak* sculpture when they would return with a good amount of rubber. They obviously did. The rhinoceros representation was to be sold to a Chinese and would, supposedly, fetch some 200 to 300 florins.

ORIGINAL BELIEFS IN RHINOCEROS PARTS

The Chinese have imported several beliefs in the properties of the rhinoceros into Borneo, which will be discussed in the next part. Although all our information is necessarily comparatively recent, presumably some rhinoceros parts were valued by Bornean man independent of Chinese influence.

The prehistoric man of Niah at least once used a rhinoceros radius as a ritual 'pillow' in a burial place (Harrisson, 1957: 164, pl. Pb, 1975: 71, Medway, 1959). Eight teeth fragments of young rhinoceros found in Niah, unconnected with food remains, suggest that they were valued for their own sake (Medway, 1958, Harrisson, 1961: 127). Their exact use, as charms or medicine, is unknown. Today rhinoceros teeth (sometimes said to be those of a dragon) are sold as medicine (Medway, 1958: 637). Significantly the milk teeth of young rhinoceros were used as amulets (*Melatti badak*) in Java (Burg, 1885: 211-212).

To the Bornean man the rhinoceros was in the first place a symbol of strength and invincibility. In Apo Kajan, rhinoceros nails were worn as amulets around the hand, or fastened to a headhunter's sword (Mjöberg, 1930: fig. 190). Perhaps for the same reason, sword hilts carved from the animal's horn were highly valued (Hose & McDougall, 1966, II: 221 note). Other rhinoceros parts may have had the same significance. Ideas about sexual vigour possibly were derived from this. It was believed that a woman who had not given birth for some time, or not at all, could be cured by pouring water through a rhinoceros's penis above her head (Jongejans, 1922: 176). A skinned tail of a rhinoceros hung up in the room would ease childbirth (Harrisson, 1956: 267). The same faculty is, for instance in India, ascribed to the animal's horn (Gee, 1964: 153). Possibly, though it is hardly likely, for this reason sometimes long rhinoceros horns are found in Bornean homes. Jongejans (1922: 165) saw one in the house of Boi Djalong in Apo Kajan and the sultan of Tenggarong had another (Bock, 1887: 111). The importance of mounted rhinoceros feet, one of which was in the Sarawak Museum (Harrisson, 1956: 269, pl. 3a), is uncertain.

Banks (1931: 21) noticed a resemblance between the penis of the rhinoceros and the *palang* or cross-bar, artificially inserted into the male organ by several Bornean people (Harrisson, 1956: 270, pl. 3b). The glans penis of the Sumatran rhinoceros is "a long and tapering cylinder, provided at the end with a second, somewhat mushroom- and trumpet shaped expansion"—and dorsally with two distinct lobes, the two *processus glandis* (Forbes, 1881: 108, cf. Cave, 1964). The similar shape of the rhinoceros's penis and the human *palang* seems to be their only point of correspondence; it is impossible to ascertain to what extent the latter is derived from the former.

Pfeffer (1958: 132) stated that young rhinoceroses were often seen in captivity in Dayak villages. I do not think he speaks, in this case, from personal experience. This claim is certainly incorrect (as Tom Harrisson once assured me).

CHINESE INFLUENCES

The use of rhinoceros parts as medicine or aphrodisiac seems not to be widespread in the Bornean interior and, where it occurs, it may be a tradition that was first introduced by Chinese traders. This is, again, most difficult to prove but there seems to be no indication that belief in rhinoceros parts as medicine originated in Borneo on its own accord, without any Chinese influence. Many properties are ascribed to all rhinoceros parts and belief in them is widespread all over Asia, and formerly in Europe (Ettinghausen, 1950, Hoogerwerf, 1970: 66ff., Jenyns, 1955, Shepard, 1967, Sody, 1959: 244ff., van Strien, 1974: 54-57, and others). Their common source seems to be China, while their origin in India is most unlikely (Ettinghausen, 1950: 111, Laufer, 1914: 154, Prater, 1939: 626). The date on which this use began is not clear. Until about the 3rd century A.D. rhinoceroses could be found in the Southern Chinese provinces (Sowerby, 1939). In the Shan-Yin period (1500-1027 B.C.) a living rhinoceros was exhibited in a Peking zoo: a few bronzes of the two-horned Sumatran rhinoceros are known from that period (Brentjes, 1973: 252, fig. 4, Jenyns, 1955: 38). At first, however, the Chinese only used the hide, as armour-plates impenetrable to arrows (Jenyns, 1955: 39). Whenever the belief in the properties in the horn—later extended to other parts—began, it is at least known as early as the Tang dynasty (589-618 A.D.) (Jenyns, 1955: 40) and may date from the 4th century A.D. (Laufer, 1914: 138, 154).

At that time rhinoceroses could no longer be found in China and their horns had to be imported, for instance from Java (Groeneveldt, 1880) or even from Arabia (Ettinghausen, 1950: 101). Again, in the

Sung dynasty (960-1279 A.D.), horns were brought to China from India, Malaya, Indo-China, Java and Africa (Wheatley, 1959: 77). Harrison (1956: 264) likes to include Borneo in the T'ang rhinoceros trade, but no evidence to that extent exists. The first contacts between China and Borneo may have been as late as Sung times, and Borneo is not mentioned clearly as a source of rhinoceros horns until Ming times (1368-1644) (Laufer, 1914: 165, n.3).

RHINOCEROS HUNTING AND TRADE

The rhinoceros has always been hunted by Bornean people, both for the excitement of the long chase and as a source of good food. Especially the hunting methods of the Punans are well documented in the literature.² No women are allowed to join such a hunting expedition (Lumholtz, 1921: 334), which can sometimes last for several weeks. The men go into the jungle and follow some fresh rhinoceros track until they spot the animal. Then they lie in ambush alongside a suitable trail until the rhinoceros trots along. A spear is thrust into its side or belly, but usually this does not kill it. A pursuit follows which can last days or weeks. Frequently spears or poisonous arrows (arrows indeed!) are directed to the animal which slowly weakens and dies (Hose, 1926: 106, Hose & McDougall, 1966: 145, Nieuwenhuis, 1900, II: 67, Pfeffer, 1963: 89-90, Piazzini, n.d.: 163). A special rhinoceros spear is described by Krohn (1927: 246): "It has a razor edge along both sides of the blade from point to hilt. The blade is fully 10 inches long and two and a half inches wide." It cannot, however, be adapted as a war spear. Similar weapons and methods were probably employed by other Bornean people, like the Penyahbongs (Lumholtz, 1921: 177). Recently, of course, rifles too have taken their toll (Tillema, 1936: 45).

Ever since the 'rhinoceros beliefs' were introduced to Borneo, in about the 11th or 12th century, they have spread and are now no longer confined to the Chinese population (cf. Hoogerwerf, 1970: 68), but they have hardly reached the interior. Punans, and others, hunt the rhinoceros and trade its valuable parts with Dayaks in exchange of tobacco or food. The Dayak sells them, either directly or through another middleman, to the Chinese dealers along the coast (Tehupeiurij, 1906: 101, Pfeffer, 1963: 90; cf. Dunn (1975) for a similar situation in Malaya). The article is subsequently exported to China, or used by the local population. The different beliefs have already brought the rhinoceros very near extinction and it is likely to perish before the end of the century!

² A general account of the present-day hunting methods employed by the Punan Busang in Sarawak is given by Sloan (1975), but no reference to the rhinoceros is given.

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